

**Comprehension questions from the description of places****To the land of snow = Ahtushi Deshpande**

A Walk to the Milam Glacier on the edge of Tibet.- Ahtushi Deshpande

A 24-hour journey in a UP Roadways bus is not the most comfortable way to get to Munsiyari, I realise, as I count the numerous bumps on my head the morning after. I had been rudely awakened, several times during the journey - most notably around midnight, when the bus followed in hot pursuit of a rabbit, the passengers cheering on the driver. (The rabbit was eventually caught, put in a sack and locked up in the glove compartment.) But when I step off the bus in Munsiyari, all memories of the bizarre journey vanish - the five mythological Pandavas stand proud before my eyes, their legend forever ensconced in the five majestic peaks of the Panchchuli range. Situated in a remote corner of Kumaon bordering Tibet and Nepal, Munsiyari was once a bustling entrepot of trade. On a trekking trail north-west of Munsiyari is the Milam Glacier, one of the longest in the region.

The four-day trek to the village of Milam at the end of this old trade route to Tibet is dotted with abandoned Bhutia villages. In the wake of the India- China war of 1962, trade came to a halt and the hardy Bhutia traders migrated to the towns and cities below. I am eager to set off on the trek to the glacier. Mr. Rare, the KMVN (Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam) manager, is helpful and tells me that his father, Khem Nam, could act as guide on my trek. Khem Nam turns out to be fully 65 years old, a veteran of these valleys. We make a list of provisions and set off shopping at the Munsiyari bazaar, a stronghold of the Bhutia traders. As I make my purchases, the shop-owner proudly tells me that his daughter and son-in-law hold important IAS posts in Delhi. The Bhutias, who once ruled the trade routes, may have lost their business, but they have retained their enterprise. It is heartening to meet Laxmi, our porter, the following morning. He is a sturdy young man and seems like just the support frailKhem Nam and I need. Rucksacks loaded, we head straight down to the Gori river.

For three days our path first takes us upstream along the Goriganga, and then into the shrouded Milam valley where the narrow gorges afford few views. Abandoned Bhutia villages dot our path and I increasingly get the feeling that we are traversing a long-forgotten route. On the fourth day we cross the ghost villages of Burfu and Bilju before we reach Milam.

It is now our sixth day on the trek; it has rained the whole night, and the morning brings even drearier weather. At over 4000m, firewood is hard to come by. Keeping warm is tough, and distraction is the best recourse. The sun plays truant for most of the day, raising doubts about the feasibility of our venturing further up. Howling winds, clouds, bright sunshine and hailstorms chase each other through the skies, and I spend the day moseying in and out of our cave. We are camped at RagashKund, a little pond with a shepherd's cave on a grassy meadow above the glacier, where we sit out the bad weather for two days and nights. From Milam village it has taken us a day to get to our current position, en route to Suraj Kund which (as I am later told) takes a detour via heaven because "you gotta be dead first" before you get there. The rains of 1997 caused a lot of damage to the terrain and we are told that no one ventured beyond the snout of the glacier that year. But Khem Nam is not to be deterred. "I know the glacier like the back of my hand, I will find us a way", he insists. His confidence is heartening - my map does,

after all, show a trekking trail, and I am fascinated with the idea of seeing this sacred lake nestled in a far nook of the glacier. On the slope opposite our camp is the fascinating summit of Mandayo, which spirals up into the blue sky like a giant corkscrew. Slapped with steep cliffs on all faces, it looks every inch an insurmountable peak. To my immediate right the Nanda Pal glacier slopes down sharply. It could easily have been built up as a very challenging ski slope except, of course, for the fact that it ends in a cold and menacing snout with icy waters flowing beneath. I feel as if I have trespassed on some hidden and forbidden world of beautiful peaks and ominous glaciers. For the locals the glaciated region is one to be feared - a land of demons and spirits waiting to devour the unholy, but for the avid trekker, a journey into what is literally a no man's land can be the experience of a lifetime.

To see the cold snowy peaks coming to life with the first rays of the sun is simply magical. Getting to SurajKund is now the task at hand. Entire slopes have, well, slid down, taking with them the centuries old path. To my untrained eye, the glacier looks impossible to walk on. Luckily, Khem Nam thinks otherwise he has done a recce the previous evening and is now sure of our route. After a big breakfast, we set off on the final leg of our pilgrimage to SurajKund. It is not an easy path - we hop overstones on landslides and delicately tread on the glacier rubble. The majestic mountains towering all around still look surreal, offering distraction from the

fretful path. In all, nine smaller glaciers feed the Milam glacier system, each with its own set of peaks from which they emerge

Crevasses dot our route as Khem Nam lines it with dark stone markers to help us return. As we walk dead centre of the glacier, the 80m icefall starting from the base of the Hardeoli and Trishuli peaks comes into fuller view. The last leg is up, a landslide. I turn a corner and there below, in a hidden nook sandwiched between two glaciers, stand the twin ponds of Dudh and Surajikund with the stunning icefall forming a magnificent backdrop. I greedily bend down to drink some water from the holy pond -it is the sweetest I have ever tasted: it is a long haul back and we reached our camp at Ragash Kund only after nightfall.

The following morning we return to Milam by afternoon, the skies are showering down snowflakes the size of my palm. It snows continuously for the next three days and nights, leaving us stranded in the 'civilisation' of Milam. Patience is an art well learnt when one is at the mercy of nature. Just when mine is beginning to wear thin, the skies clear. The autumn landscape is turning wintry.

I am out on the path by six there is something I am keen to see. Three kilometres off from Milam lie the ruins of Bilju. Icicles hang from abandoned roofs, and fields of creamy snow line the tops. Facing the ghost village stand the twin peaks of Nanda Devi main and Nanda Devi east. I am transfixed. It is like the view you get from Binsar, but with an 800mm zoom lens attached to your eyes!

I look deeply into its visage, trying to etch in my mind every detail of the vast expanse of the valley and the fallen abandoned village, blessed by a goddess -no less than Nanda Devi herself. I pay my obeisance, Khem Nam and Laxmi arrive, and we head back towards Munsiyari and traffic.

**Important questions taken from book:**

1. What are the purpose of the author 's journey to the "land of the snow"?
2. who are the 5 mythological pandavas from the write's point of view?

5 majestic peaks of the panchchuli rang.

3. What are remains of the deserted village of milam?

The ruins of bilju lie just below milam. Icicles hang from abandoned roofs. The fields of creamy snow line up the tops.

4. Give reasons as to why it is difficult to keep warm in the Tibetan mountain range?

5. Because at the 4000m altitude, under constant snowfall, rains, howling winds, it is difficult to collect firewood to keep oneself warm.

6. What is meant by-

a) The sun plays truant for most of the day?

The sunlight is mostly covered by thick clouds. One is unable to get a glimpse of the sun through out the day.

b) You gotta be dead first?

The route to suraj kund is paved with moral danger. During the 1997 rains, the beaten track had been mostly wiped out.

c) His confidence is heartening?

Khem nam, the guide had gone and verified the trek the previous evening. He was confident that they could make it. This confident heartened the author.

7. Why does the write feel that he has trespassed on some hidden or forbidden world of beauty?

The local hill people believed the glaciated region was to be feared. They claimed that it was a land of demons and spirits. They waited to eat away unholy trekkers.

**Important details:**

1. author travel to munsiyari = by bus
2. The trip to munisiyari at night= tedious
3. The author see at the panchchuli range= 5 mythological range
4. milam glacier located= northwest of munsiyari
5. the author shop his provisions= in munsiyari
6. Villages that were abandoned due to indo- china war= bhutia
7. Bhutia traders= are migrated to the towns and cities below the hills.
8. Khem nam accompanied the author as a guide
9. Laxmi= porter who carried the author's luggage.
10. The author take four days to reach milam
11. Burfu and bilju- 2 ghost village they crossed before reaching milam

12. It rained the whole night during their trek on the sixth day.
13. The weather on the seventh day morning was worse.
14. they see howling winds, clouds, brightshine and hailstorms chasing each other from the cave.
15. The cave is located at the ragash kund.
16. They stay in the cave for 2 days and 2 nights.
17. Summit of mandayo is opposite to their cave.
18. Nanda pal glacier is sloped down sharply
19. Walk to suraj kund is appeared impossible to the author.
20. Hardeoli and trishuli- 2 peaks the author saw from suraj kund.
21. The author drinks water in twin ponds of dudh.
22. They reach camp at ragesh kund after nightfall
23. They stranded at Milam for 3 days.
24. Nanda Devi main and Nanda Devi east- peaks facing the ghost village.
25. The author pays his obeisance to the goddess nanda devi.

### Yaanai Malai

#### From the multi facet of my Madurai- manohar devadoss

[Sometimes, landscapes can speak to us. But they only talk if we are willing to listen to them.

Manohar devadoss loves his hometown Madurai. A scientist by profession, the writer has produced some exquisite pen sketches of Madurai and its surroundings. One of his sketches of Yaanai Malai has been reproduced here for you.

But what makes him extraordinary is not his versatility. It is his indomitable spirit.

For more than thirty years, Manohar Devadoss has had Retinitis Pigmentosa, an eye disorder that slowly but surely reduces vision. His wife Mahema, an immensely courageous person in her own right, was paralyzed below the shoulders, following a road accident 36 years ago\_ The love that they could bring to each other in the face of great tragedy has been a source of inspiration to all who have known them.

Read, and discover it ]

The city of Madurai has been in existence for at least 2400 years. Throughout its history the city has nurtured Tamil literature. Over the centuries, Madurai has become famous for its temple complex. Rich in traditions, this ancient temple town has acquired its very own mythologies, evolving its own customs and festivals.

A dominant landmark of the north-eastern outskirts of Madurai is Yaanai Malai, a solid rocky hill. When seen or approached from Madurai, this hill has a rather striking resemblance to a seated elephant - hence the name Yaanai Malai. (Elephant Hill). Dotted with starkly beautiful Palmyra trees, this part of rural Madurai had a character all its own,

The paddy fields here were nourished by monsoon rains, supplemented by water from large wells called Yettrams, which have all but vanished from the rural scene today. Yettrams were extensively used during my boyhood to draw water from these large, square, irrigation wells. A yettram well had long casuarina poles tied together with a rope, a large bucket made of leather at one end and a counterpoise at the other, enabling a man to single-handedly draw large volumes of water.

On a cool moon in October, in the early 1950s, a school friend and I, on an impulse, decided to take a cross-country trek to Yaanai Malai, climb up the hill and stand on its head to look at Madurai and the surrounding country. At one stage the hill seemed close enough but as we walked on it seemed to move further away. Suddenly an idyllic rural scene presented itself. We saw watery fields being ploughed. There was a large, square yettram well from which a wiry old man was drawing water. Yaanai Malai was an imposing and silent backdrop.

Monsoon clouds began to gather, darkening the upper sky and softening the light falling on the austere scene. The landscape was placid but the sky was in turmoil. And yet, there was perfect harmony between land and sky. The sky became darker and light played games on the hill. A large drop of water hit my head. Almost immediately, a heavy downpour tore open the sky and the hill instantly disappeared behind curtains of water. As we walked back to Madurai thoroughly drenched, my friend complained with chattering teeth that the rain had ruined our plan.

I thought that what we had witnessed moments earlier was a rare visual gift and that we could always climb Yaanai Malai some other day. But my destiny decreed that, in this life, I was not to climb up this hill to enjoy viewing Madurai and its enveloping beauty. However, many years

later - in October 1986 — I was to capture in ink on paper, the magic of the moment, of that distant afternoon, before lashing rains obliterated the serene landscape.

During my adolescence, Yaanai Malai inspired in me a sense of mystique. Though I gave a premium to rationalism then, I had difficulty thinking of Yaanai Malai as a non-living, huge chunk of stone.

To me the hill seemed like a silent witness to all that was happening in Madurai, through Its history. To this day, I dream of this hill In ways that relate to visual

pleasure In 2001, at a time when my vision - due to an Incurable visual syndrome, Retinitis pigmentosa had declined to a level when I was hardly able to see any details of a distant landscape, I dreamt that my wife, Mahema — who became paralysed below her shoulders, following a road accident in 1972— was in her wheelchair and that I stood by her side on top of Yaanai Malai. in this vivid dream, I showed her some of the important landmarks of Madurai, the tower of the large Vandiyoor temple tank, the cupolas of the historic palace called the mahal, the great gateway towers of the temple and many hills far and near. I told Mahema In my dream that had Thirumalal Nayak the ruler who had built the mahal three-and-a-half centuries earlier, climbed up the hill then, he would have had a view not vastly different from the one we were looking at.

The monolith, Yaanal Malai looks like an elephant only when it is viewed from the southwest. Happily, Madurai sits to the southwest of Yaanai Malai. What appears from Madurai to have a pyramidal shape is in actuality a very elongated hill. The Melur road from Madurai runs many miles parallel to the south eastern slope of the hill. When viewed from here, the hill has a different yet dominant appeal, as one can see from this drawing of the hill that I completed In June 2002 and have pleasure in presenting below. The broad band of paddy fields ends not far from the hill and then the monolith rises abruptly and steeply like a mighty fortress. The pale brown hue of the hill is enriched by discrete downward streaks of rust-red stains.

During the cool winter months, before the emerald of the paddy fields slowly turns into a wealth of gold, small flocks of lily-white egrets alight here to feast upon the tiny, silvery fish that stray into the shallow waters of the fields. The egret's slow, flapping take-off and the gentle swoop of soft-landing-as they hop from one part of the field to another — are as graceful as the movements of ballerinas.

The borders of the paddy fields are often lined with rows of Palmyra trees. Small bushes grow wild at the foot of the trees. During the winter season, these plants burst into thousands of yellow flames of flowers.

**Questions taken from book:**

1. In which direction from Madurai is yaanai malai situated?  
North eastern
2. Why is the hill called yaanaimalai?  
Hills resembles a seated elephant
3. The other name for yaanai malai= elephant hill
4. A yetraam is made up of long casuarinas poles
5. The author dreamt of visiting with his wife is elephant hills.
6. The author was affected by retinitis pigmentosa- an eye disorder that slowly reduce the vision

**Important details:**

- Yaanaimalai is considered as the dominant landmark of Madurai
- The surroundings of yaanaimalai looks beautiful with Palmyra trees. Small bushes grow at the foot of the Palmyra trees. During winter season the plants burst their yellow flowers.
- The paddy fields were vanished
- The farmers take water from the huge wells by yettram
- The authors childhood dreams was to climb on the elephant hills.
- The author wants to see the natural beauty of the surroundings from the top of the hill.the land looks placid
- There was a heavy rain when he trekked to yaanaimalai. So he didn't reach the hill.
- The author see beautiful rays of light on the hill after the rain.
- As a adolescent he thought the yaanaimalai was a lifeless huge chunk of stone.

**Brihadeeswarar temple**

The Brihadeeswarar Temple or The Big Temple as it is commonly called by the natives of Tanjore, is an architectural marvel of immense glory, that has astounded the world with its



stupendous proportions and grandeur. Built in the year 1010 by King Raja Raja Chola, this monument of World Heritage has, for a thousand years, stood as a symbol of the flourishing sculptural expertise and rich culture of ancient India.

Tanjore, 'the Granary of Tamilnadu' is also the home of carnatic music, dance and traditional handicrafts. Thanjavur was the ancient capital of the Chola kings, and the stylized bronze work for which the Chola period was famous, is still produced in this town.

Having overloaded myself with this and more information on Tanjore, I reached the palace in search of all the glory of the old Chola capital. The 16<sup>th</sup> century palace complex was built by the nayaaks and later renovated by the Marathas. Situated close to the old bus stand, the first of the museums I visited here was the Royal Museum, "Is this the might and valour of the Cholas I heard of? What am I seeing here?" I wondered: a scantily lit room with drums, urns, perfume bottles, wooden boxes, manuscripts, gifts, jewellery, weapons and other belongings of the Marathas.

A painting of a Maratha King welcomes you to the Durbar Hall. On the rear side of the painting an array of Pallava and Chola statues throws light on the craftsmanship of their era. The Art Gallery at the palace has an impressive line-up of granite and bronze monolithic statues, with details of excavation and century of origin clearly displayed: the gods, goddesses and other statues take you to a different era. The magnificent monolithic statues evince energy and life; the aura in their eyes beam a story of fine craftsmanship and effort. Vishnu, Ganesha or Nataraja look exactly the same as they look in today's images and statues. I also did notice a Buddha statue from the Pallava era here.

From the palace, I moved to the Brihadeeswara Temple. The structure of the temple looks majestic. The temple occupies an area measuring about 750 feet by 400 feet, in a fort surrounded by a moat. It is a marvel of engineering, considering the technology of those ancient times. The towering vimanam is built up with stones with bonding and notching, without the use of mortar. The topmost stone, weighing about 80 tons, is still a matter of discussion for engineers who are baffled as to how the builders lifted it to that height without the help of modern contrivances. A charming tale is told about a ramp being built from a village — Sarapallam- four miles away, from where the giant stone was pulled up by elephants. The details of the stonework of this imposing vimanam are representative of the masterly

craftsmanship of South Indian artisans. The shilpi(sculptor) and the sthapethi(architect) came together to create their fanciful abode for Shiva. Naturally, the shape had to echo the divine Mount Kailash. In its perfect geometry and distinct clarity of lines, this tower is unbeatable.

The shrine for Lord Muruga is an integral part of the temple. It Is a beautiful, elaborately carved stone structure, a designer's delight. To copy the unrepeated designs on each of the short pillars of this shrine would take an artist weeks if not months. One can just imagine how long the stone chiseller would have taken to complete each piece.

I stood in awe, astonishment and reverence when I saw a walled fortress Inside - a standing testimony of the Cholas' opulence and vision. The enormity of the deities reflect the staunch reverence of the King to Lord Shiva. Rajaraja, his sister and queens donated their possessions of gold and silver to this temple. The gold the king donated came from his treasury.

The Intricate carvings on the pillars and the inscriptions on the walls make the temple a delight for a historian's senses. The script used in the inscriptions resemble Tamil, Thai or some of the South EastAsian languages. The huge (8.7m height) Shiva Linga in the Sanctum Sanctorum and Nandhi Statue reflect the munificence of the Cholas. The pillared cloisters beside the main structure have a series of deities and Shiva lingas, worthy to be admired. The murals narrate the story Shiva's might.

Among the things visible are the interlocks of the granite stones. The rocks so perfectly fitted into one another at a height of 10 metres seems to share a harmonious bonding, unnerved by the rains, winds and heat. Very well maintained, this structure will leave you with thoughts like, 'Was it actually built in the 11th' century?'

Unlike many temples, here the 58m tall and 13-storeyed Vimanam makes the Gopuram. The inscriptions of the Vimanam talk about Raja Raja Chola's gifts to the temple. In its magnanimous idea, its grandiose vision, Its display of the herculean effort in construction, its portrayal of their glorious past of the Chola regime and their patronage for arts and culture, this temple stands as testimony for all and ever.

One can spend a whole day in the Big Temple, and still want to come back to marvel at every detail of its beauty. Many kings had built temples to Shiva on the banks of the Keyed. Many saints have sung in praise of these deities. But there is only one temple to Brihadeesvara , and

it stands tall, a thousand years after a devotee-king climbed a ladder with a copper pot (kalasam) anointed with holy water from all the sacred rivers, to dedicate it to history. Our history!

**Question taken from book:**

1. How old is the Brihadeeswarar Temple? Who built it?  
The Brihadeeswarar Temple is thousand years old.  
The Brihadeeswarar Temple was built by Rajaraja Chola.
2. Who built the palace? By whom was it renovated?  
The place was built by The Nayaks. It was renovated by the Marathas.
3. What were the Pallava and the Chola eras famous for?  
The Pallava and the Chola eras were famous for monolithic statues.
4. What is the speciality of the vimanam?  
The vimanam is built with stones and without mortar. The topmost stone weighs 80 tons.
5. What aspect of the temple baffles engineers till this day?  
The topmost stone of the vimanam weighs 80 tons that how the builders lifted it so high without machines baffles engineers till this day.
6. In what way is the tower unbeatable?  
The tower has perfect geometry and clarity. Thus, it is unbeatable.
7. What stands testimony to the chola's opulence?  
The Bigtemple has a walled fortress. It stands testimony to the chola's opulence.
8. How is the king's reverence to the lord revealed?  
The enormity of the deities reveal the king's reverence to the lord.
9. What evokes wonder in the on lookers?  
The pillared cloisters have deities and lingas.  
There the granite stones are interlocked harmoniously.
10. What are the contributions of the Cholas towards arts and culture?  
Cholas built many temples.  
They donated gold and silver to the temples.  
They also patronized for the development of art and culture.
11. Who consecrated the temple? How?

Rajaraja Chola was consecrated the temple by climbing a ladder with a copper pot of holy water.

12. How necessary is it to preserve these monuments of our culture? Why?

These monuments symbolize the flourishing sculptural expertise and rich culture of ancient India. So, it is greatly necessary to preserve them.

13. List out the specialities of Tanjore.

Tanjore was the capital of the Chola Kings.

It is the granary of Tamil Nadu.

It is the home of Carnatic music.

14. What is written on the vimanam?

The inscriptions on the vimanam talk about Rajaraja Chola's gifts to the big temple.

15. What are the things that reflect the generous attitude of the Chola King and his family?

Rajaraja, his sister and queens donated gold and silver to the Big Temple. The gold came from his treasure. These reflect the generous attitude of the Chola King and his family.

**Other important details:**

1. Tanjore is the granary of tamilnadu
2. Things displayed at the royal museum in tanjore – drums, urns, manuscripts, weapons, etc.,
3. A few statues in the art gallery- statues of Vishnu, nataraja, Buddha
4. The speciality of the vimanam is built up with stones by bonding and notching. Height of the vimanam is 216 feet.
5. Our duty towards this monument is to preserve it.
6. In temple tower geometry is unbeatable.
7. The big temple reflects the divine abode of lord shiva which is at mount kailash.
8. There are no repeated carvings and designs in the temple.
9. "King Raja raja chola's gift to the temple " is written on the vimanam.
10. Raja raja cholam consecrated the big temple. Holy water brought from all sacred rivers